

**Summary of Findings & Recommendations from the
Institute for Canadian Citizenship's *Playing Together: New Citizens, Sports & Belonging* Report**

Summary of Findings

Time and cost. The first few years after arriving in Canada are intense: finding jobs and homes, and getting children settled in school are key priorities. Our survey results and focus group discussions indicate that the 'survival period' can last much longer than the first few years. Even after becoming more established, new citizens are busy building careers and raising families, leaving little time to dedicate to sports, either as participants or fans.

Newness brings nervousness. Focus group participants also identified a hesitation that comes with being in a new environment. They may not be confident in their ability to learn a new sport (especially completely unfamiliar winter sports) or to break into already established sports networks.

Sports in Canada are highly organized ... for Canadians. The structure of organized sports in Canada is formal and regimented in a way that makes sense to those who were raised here, but can be confusing and intimidating to newcomers, many of whom are used to a "pickup" sports culture. Unfamiliarity with league play or sports infrastructure (such as community centres) and the inability to find the appropriate skill level or anyone to play with all play a role in keeping new citizens on the sidelines.

Violence in sports. Many new citizens are hesitant about sports that are overly aggressive or violent. Parents are reluctant to put their children in hockey – or even attend a game – because fighting is allowed.

Playing/watching sports costs a lot. Cost was cited numerous times as a barrier to participation. Ideas such as a tax benefit for adults who play organized sports (much like the current federal tax credit for children in sport) could ease the financial burden. Providing information about equipment exchanges, subsidized equipment purchase plans and used equipment sales would also be helpful. Developing "first-time buyer" plans with substantial discounts to attend professional games is another way to help new citizens experience a sport. As we heard many times, once you get someone in the door, the experience of simply being present is a game-changing experience.

Information doesn't reach its audience. Many new citizens reported that they just don't know where to look for information, and that the information they find is incomplete. This applied to sports they wanted to practice and those in which they wanted to register their children. They also don't know where to find information to purchase cheap tickets or where to read up on the rules before heading to a game.

Recommendations

Let new citizens try before they buy. Create opportunities for new citizens to participate in "learn to" camps and 101s in the form of onetime or multiple-day workshops. New citizens can also encourage native-born Canadians to try an unfamiliar sport, such as badminton or cricket, for a day. Canadians can make learning and playing a two-way street.

Create multiple access points. Create opportunities to meet professional teams and players, both at the stadium and in the community.

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Getting new citizens in the game. The new citizens who participated in this study suggested a number of strategies that can be adopted to make sports more accessible for new citizens and, perhaps, hasten their integration into Canadian life.

- Create a centralized online information hub on sports in Canada, especially designed for newcomers.
- Include basic information about sports and recreation infrastructure in the Welcome Package distributed when permanent residents enter Canada.
- Distribute information on sports participation and sporting events where newcomers congregate – at settlement organizations, English/French classes, libraries, and communities centres.
- Recruit new citizen ambassadors and send them out into their communities armed with information. Capitalized on the expertise new citizens bring and engage them as volunteers, coaches, etc.
- Give new citizens the chance to try a sport with little financial risk or time commitment through 'learn to' opportunities.
- Create entry-level pricing for lessons or memberships.
- Promote workplace-based sports and recreation.
- Create a tax benefit for adults who play sports.
- Offer newcomers discounted tickets for sporting events, with an explanation of the sport and its rules.
- Get professional sports teams out into communities to develop connections with their members and increase familiarity with sports and its players.

Tell us more! Informing new citizens about sports. Structural barriers to participation were compounded by communication difficulties, both in *what* is being said about sports and *where* information is available. On these challenges, new citizens said:

- **Put information online.** Re-work the information that is available online about a sport by including more "101" content and taking care to simplify language and remove jargon. It is also important to remove the assumption that "everyone knows this" about a sport in favour of clear, accessible information. Ask new citizens to review "101" information to ensure new eyes understand the content.
- **Meet new citizens where they are.** Distribute information at key locations on newcomers' journey to becoming Canadian: through "welcome packages" offered at airports, English as a Second Language classes, settlement organizations, libraries and community centres.
- **Empower new citizens.** Recruit sports ambassadors, empowering new citizens to tell their stories. As new citizens become involved in sporting activities, encourage them to volunteer and help shape organizations by reaching out to new communities.